

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Board of Regents  
**From:** Board Office  
**Subject:** University of Northern Iowa Honors Program  
**Date:** May 8, 2000

**Recommended Action:**

Approve the University of Northern Iowa Honors Program.

**Executive Summary:**

The University of Northern Iowa is requesting approval of an Honors Program. This request is consistent with the Board's objective to improve the quality of educational programs (KRA 1.0.0.0, Objective 1.1.0.0.). The request is also related to the first goal of the University of Northern Iowa Strategic Plan, which is to "create and maintain an intellectually demanding and stimulating environment for all members of the University community." A particular action step associated with reaching this goal is the establishment of a University-wide Honors Program. The UNI Honors Program that the University plans to inaugurate in the Fall of 2001 is designed to meet the needs of students of exceptional ability and academic achievement from across the University.

The program is being proposed for the following six reasons:

1. Such a program would help UNI to address the special needs of more motivated and capable individuals. A university's reputation depends, in large part, on the achievements of its graduates, and UNI cannot help but benefit from committing itself to providing a program meant to assist its best students in achieving their goals.
2. While sensitive to concerns of elitism, the University believes that honors students will enhance UNI's academic atmosphere. While those students accepted to the Honors Program will and should be given every opportunity to interact and grow together, required "honors courses" made up exclusively of honors students will constitute, at most, twenty-five percent of the honors students' curriculum. For the most part, honors students will be enrolled in regular courses.

3. The UNI Honors Program is meant to enhance teaching across the University. The courses designated exclusively for honors students will be held to small enrollments (20 maximum). This is meant not only to give the honors students more individual attention, but to allow teachers to take risks and try experimental instructional methods that they might not otherwise be willing to attempt, including offering interdisciplinary courses that are team-taught by professors from more than one discipline. The University hopes that professors will be able to work closely together and learn from each other, and that new teaching techniques, if successful, will then be applied to regular classes.
4. An Honors Program will allow UNI to more effectively recruit and retain exceptional students. An Honors Program will add to the reputation of the entire University, demonstrating serious commitment to academics.
5. UNI already has a highly successful Honors Program in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Initiated in 1998 with an enrollment of 20 students, enrollment more than tripled to 64 students in its second year. Students are very enthusiastic about the program and it has helped immensely with recruiting exceptional students within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (CSBS). Moreover, colleges at UNI other than CSBS have already indicated they would like to establish similar honors programs. Aside from the efficiency of one program as opposed to several, a University-wide program would allow students to take honors courses outside of their own college, creating a truly liberal arts honors program and improving the quality and breadth of opportunity of the program.
6. At present the University is investing in the idea of a First Year Experience Program. The Honors Program would identify a group of students for whom such a first year experience program can be tailored.

The mission of the University of Northern Iowa Honors Program will be to attract, retain, and meet the needs of students of exceptional academic achievement, provide an intellectual environment that will stimulate the intellectual curiosity of these students, provide a social environment that will help these students develop close ties with each other and with faculty, provide a learning environment that will allow faculty to experiment with new and different teaching techniques, with the hope that successful techniques may be implemented with larger classes, and enhance the reputation of the University of Northern Iowa.

**Background:**

**TWO DESIGNATIONS PROPOSED:**

The honors program will offer two designations for participation: *University Honors with Distinction* and *University Honors*.

Requirements for graduation from the honors program, *University Honors with Distinction*, a student must produce an honors thesis or honors project and take a total of 32 hours of honors credit. Of these hours:

- ◆ 12 hours are to be taken in General Education honors courses from four of the six General Education categories;
- ◆ 6 hours are to be taken in honors seminars;
- ◆ 3 hours are to be taken in thesis or honors project research;
- ◆ 11 additional hours are to be taken from honors sections of university courses, including General Education courses, seminars, and independent study. Presidential Scholar seminars count for credit in this category.

Requirements for graduation from the honors program, *University Honors*, a student must produce an honors thesis or equivalent honors project and take a minimum of 20 hours of honors credit. Of these hours:

- ◆ 6 hours are to be taken in honors seminars;
- ◆ 3 hours are to be taken in thesis or honors project research;
- ◆ 11 additional hours are to be taken from honors sections of University courses including General Education courses, seminars, and independent study. Presidential Scholar seminars count for credit in this category.

**Thesis or Equivalent Honors Project**

The thesis or equivalent honors project will be an independent scholarly or creative activity related to the student's major. Students will have a predefined goal and will communicate their results to others. An honors student will present a proposal for a thesis or honors project to a prospective advisor and to the head of the honors program, both of whom must deem it appropriate for three credit hours of work. The honors student will meet with the advisor on a regular basis, prepare a mid-term progress report to be signed by the thesis or project advisor, and deliver a presentation on the completed thesis or project to the advisor and the head with time for questions. Other faculty and students may be invited to attend.

## **Size of the Program**

The Honors Program should be no larger than 5% of the University's undergraduate enrollment, providing an eventual total of approximately 600 students with an ultimate cap on the recruitment of honors students at 150 per year. To allow each honors student to enroll in at least one honors course each semester would require an offering of between 30 and 40 honors sections per semester across the entire University if the program were fully enrolled. However, this will take some years to allow time to work out the match-up of resources and numbers of students and to adjust the program accordingly.

## **PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION:**

The program will be headed by a Director who reports to the Provost or the Provost's designee. In addition, an "oversight committee" consisting of a faculty representative appointed by each UNI Collegiate Dean will:

- ◆ Serve the Director in an advisory capacity;
- ◆ Work with the Director of the Honors Program to communicate information about the program to the colleges;
- ◆ Provide a written review of the program, identifying its strengths and weaknesses at the end of its third year of operation and every five years thereafter;
- ◆ Ensure flexibility of the program by reviewing special cases and making decisions as needed regarding potential changes in a student's program of study.

## **ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM:**

Honors students will be selected by the Director of the program and the University honors program committee from among those applicants who meet the following minimum criteria. The number chosen will depend on the size and resources of the program.

For high school students:

An ACT score of 27 or higher – OR – a GPA of 3.65 or higher – OR – graduation in the top 20% of the student's high school class, along with an application form including a one-page essay and a description of high school activities.

For currently enrolled UNI or new transfer students:

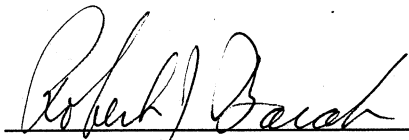
A GPA of 3.30 or higher along with an application form, including a one-page essay.

### RETENTION IN THE PROGRAM:

To remain in the program students must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point requirement of 3.30. Students who fail to do this will be placed on probation for one semester. During that semester a student must achieve a non-cumulative grade point average of 3.30 to be removed from probation. A demonstration of improvement without attaining a 3.30 GPA may be grounds for continued probation. However, if no improvement is shown during the probationary semester, the student will be dismissed from the program. If a student wishes to re-enter the program, reapplication is necessary.

### INITIAL BUDGET:

An initial budget of \$70,000 will be used for staff, equipment, and other support.

  
Robert J. Barak

Approved:

  
Frank J. Stork